

# Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education

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## Making Gratitude Explicit

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## MAKING GRATITUDE EXPLICIT

*Maggie Larson, Bryn Mawr College '10*

Thinking back on the TLI partnerships I had as a student consultant, I was struck by the confidence and trust I built with my faculty partners. The three partnerships I participated in ranged from subject matter closely aligned with my interests to content far and away from the familiar. In one case I was able to build a TLI partnership with a professor whose class I had taken and whom I knew well, and in others I forged new relationships with professors I wouldn't have otherwise likely had the chance to work with. Each partnership in these ways and others presented unique experiences, yet trust and confidence were present and real cornerstones of all of them.

Trust and confidence can be pretty amorphous characteristics, however. It's difficult to discern exactly what needs to be present in order for them to get established. But as I reviewed the process-oriented exchanges within the different configurations of the TLI program, I noticed something integral to trust and confidence that was both not at all surprising, and also rather profound: explicit gratitude.

In my review of TLI work, I looked through old email exchanges, notes from meetings and my observation fieldwork from the classroom; genuine and mutual feelings of appreciation and gratitude were present throughout. While saying thank you is a part of being well mannered and for some a habit, the quality and kind of gratitude I found expressed in the TLI program were more significant. Gratitude came in the form of a simple thanks for sending notes but more often was given with a notice of the bigger themes and supports that emerge in the TLI. Expressing thanks helped affirm efforts and celebrate victories. Further, when there were challenges, the exchanges of gratitude were restorative and often acknowledged the real risks involved with engaging in this work.

In the attached graphic, I have attempted to demonstrate the multiple forms expression of gratitude took with excerpts from my TLI partnerships and experiences outside of it. The black text is my voice and the red represents voices of those with whom I worked. The set of circles captures both the distinct and the overlapping arenas in which gratitude unfolded. As the outer circles illustrate, there are real connections and similarities in the quality and kind of thanks shared in these different contexts. There is gratitude for time shared, for perspective offered, for reassurance given, and simply for attention paid. There is gratitude for deeper understanding and for deeper connection.

As I move forward in my career and life beyond Bryn Mawr, it is clear too that 'this work' extends far beyond the TLI. I'm pressed to think of any facet of my life where teaching and learning, building relationships and really listening aren't present and paramount. I take with me many learnings from my participation in the program and particularly this element of making gratitude explicit. Developing trust and confidence is essential to healthy working and personal relationships and to being a thoughtful colleague, friend and person. These expressions of gratitude distinguished the TLI relationships I had and shape those that I am building beyond it.